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A Scientific Experiment

By WILLARD BLAKEMAN

When the Franco-Prussian war broke out Edward Penton, a young American medical student who, on account of youth, had escaped being either killed by ammunition or disease in the great struggle that had ended five years before in his own country, went to Germany and through the influence of the American minister was accepted as assistant surgeon with rank of lieutenant.

After the battle of Gravelotte, when all the medical staff was most needed, word was brought to Dr. Snedicker, medical director of the Prussian army, that the American had deliberately insulted a medical officer of his own rank and that a duel was to be fought between the two.

"This is very wrong," exclaimed the doctor with a scowl. "These two young men may both be disabled, and we have not now enough physicians to take care of the wounded."

"And yet, doctor, the challenge having passed, there is no way out of it. Both would have to leave the army if they did not fight."

"They don't fight duels in America," said Dr. Snedicker. "Send this American to me."

Penton reported, and the doctor endeavored to persuade him to apologize. "I'll tell you what I'll do, doctor," Penton replied. "I'll agree to fire an imaginary shot at him, and if he is not killed at the first fire I will apologize to him."

"What do you mean by that?" "Permit the duel on the following terms: Make two tablets, both harmless. Announce that one contains a deadly poison. The principals each choose a tablet. Convince my opponent, Lieutenant Berkhalter, that he has chosen the poisoned one."

"If that will satisfy you, proceed." As soon as the wounded were at least temporarily provided for Dr. Snedicker called a number of medical officers into his tent and, last of all, the participants of the duel. He showed them two pellets exactly alike in appearance, announcing that one was harmless while the other contained prussic acid. The one containing the poison would have the taste of the kernel of peach stones. "And now, gentlemen," concluded the doctor, "choose. It is better for this army to have one live surgeon than two disabled ones."

Berkhalter bravely stepped up to his superior, put his hand into a glass tumbler and took out one of two tablets. Penton took the remaining one. Then at a word from the commander each put his tablet in his mouth. An officer handed each a glass of water, which he was required to drink in order to make sure that he had swallowed his dose.

Berkhalter turned pale. He had recognized the taste of prussic acid given him by his superior. One of the officers stepped up to the doomed man and said:

"If you have anything to say, say it quick. The poison acts at once."

"I have only to say that I propose to die as an officer of the Prussian army should," replied the plucky doctor.

At the same time he felt his legs giving way under him, and he sank into the arms of his second, who carried him to an army cot and laid him upon it. Penton went to him and offered him his hand.

"I envy you," he said, "your opportunity to show your bravery. I would not have you die without withdrawing the offensive words I spoke to you."

But Berkhalter had passed into unconsciousness.

"Are you satisfied?" asked Dr. Snedicker to Penton.

"Wait a moment. His imagination cannot act while he is unconscious. He will revive presently."

Snedicker was disposed to put an end to the matter before it should be too late, but a German is nothing if not an investigator, and he was content to grant the request on the ground of science.

Presently Berkhalter opened his eyes; but, seeing a group of officers standing over him, watching him die, he closed them again.

One of the medical men present went to the cot and placed his hand on Berkhalter's heart, then looked anxiously at the American.

"A few minutes," he said, "will place him beyond the pale of revival."

Penton whipped a vial from his pocket and, removing the stopper, held it under his antagonist's nose. Berkhalter again opened his eyes.

"Tell him," said Penton and immediately left the tent.

"Doctor," said Snedicker, "you have not swallowed poison. The duel has been turned into a scientific demonstration. Neither tablet contained poison."

"Where is the cursed American?" cried Berkhalter, standing erect. "I shall kill him!"

"There is a written apology."

"I want no apology. I shall kill!"

A corporal came in, but Berkhalter had no mind to be handled by an enlisted man and subsided.

Penton received a warning from his commander that he had better keep out of his late opponent's way if he didn't wish to die a violent death. Instead of doing so, the next time he saw his enemy he approached him with outstretched hand.

"These Americans," said Berkhalter, "have no sentiment."

AN OBLIGING JUDGE.

He Was Eager to Do the Right Thing and Suit the Prisoner.

Baron Martin, a famous English jurist of the old school, whose native leniency and sense of fun often placed him at the mercy of the very men he was trying, was once about to sentence an old offender charged with a petty theft, according to Lord Brampton's reminiscences.

"Look," said the baron, with an assumption of severity: "I hardly know what to do, but you can take six months."

"I can't take that, my lord: it's too much," said the prisoner respectfully, but firmly. "I can't take it. Your lordship sees I didn't steal very much, after all."

The baron indulged in one of his low, chuckling laughs before replying.

"Well, that's vera true. Ye didn't steal much," he said. "Well, then, ye can take four months. Will that do—four months?"

"Nay, my lord, but I can't take that, neither," was the reply.

"Then take three."

"That's nearer the mark, my lord," the prisoner said approvingly. "But I'd rather you made it two, if you will be so kind."

"Vera well, then, take two," said the judge, with the air of one who is pleased to have done the right thing at last. "And, mind, don't come again. If you do I'll give ye—well, it all depends!"

DYNAMITE AS IT EXPLODES.

It Follows, as Lightning Does, the Line of Least Resistance.

It is the popular impression that dynamite seeks the line of greatest resistance. Place a quantity of black powder on a rock and light it with a fuse. It will flash, simply scorching the stone. Place a piece of dynamite on the same rock, and the rock will be shattered; hence the reasoning that dynamite follows the line of greatest resistance.

Nothing could be further from the truth, however. The black powder takes fire and explodes much more slowly than the dynamite, so that the elastic air that incloses it, as it does everything, gives way gradually and the force is lost in the atmosphere.

With dynamite the explosion has been so sudden, the attack on the air so instantaneous, that for a fraction of a second it actually resists. The force of the dynamite is so tremendous that it cannot wait, and it is turned into the rock, which for the instant becomes the line of least resistance.

An illustration of this may be seen during a display of lightning. A fork of it strikes across the sky. It packs the air so densely that it can no longer make rapid progress in that direction, and it turns aside to follow the line of least resistance. It cannot wait for the air to yield. It is the same with dynamite.—Harper's Weekly.

The Hazel Tree.

A curious survival of the days when the magicians of Europe sought indefatigably for the philosopher's stone is the superstition that attaches to the hazel tree. The old alchemists used to make their divining rods out of hazel twigs, and they fostered the belief that it would mysteriously direct its owner to hidden treasures if it was manipulated with the absolute faith that was required in all those occult enchantments of the middle ages. As time went on the "rod of Jacob," as a branch of hazel was universally known, gathered new powers. Not only would it lead to the discovery of buried boards, but it would also act as an infallible agent in locating runaway servants and escaped criminals. It was a sure guide to underground springs as well and was an unfailing charm against the lightning.

Utilized the Visitor.

Decamps, the famous French painter, had a studio located on the top floor of a building in Paris. A visitor to see the artist paused one day before going up to inquire if M. Decamps were in. Receiving an affirmative reply, he was just starting up the stairs when the concierge called after him:

"As you are about visiting M. Decamps, perhaps you will be so kind as to carry up these trousers that I have just brushed."

When, a few moments later, the bell of the studio rang, Decamps opened the door and found on the threshold his friend and patron, the Duke of Orleans, heir to the French throne, who smilingly presented him with his newly brushed trousers.

Mrs. Malaprop.

She was nouveau riche and had a cottage for the summer at the seashore. Her one problem was how to secure as her house guest the "recognized leader in society" in her home town.

The invitation was being verbally extended, and as a last inducement Mrs. Malaprop ended:

"And as you sit on the front porch it's so charming to watch the little white sailed boats flit pro and con."—Lippincott's.

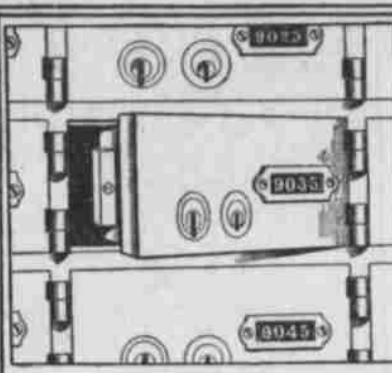
A Bad Finish.

"Did that musician have a successful engagement in Crimson Gulch?"

"Well," answered Plute Pete, "the show was well patronized. But after doing a lot of tricks with cards he made the fatal blunder of trying to sit into a poker game."—Washington Star.

Queered Himself.

Miss Withers (showing photograph of herself)—I'm afraid it's rather faded. Bluks (inexperienced, aged nineteen)—Yes, but it's just like you.—London Mail.



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